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1st Place

Cedar Heights Middle School

Grade 8

Age: 13

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Martin Luther King was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia.

He was named after his father, Martin Luther King Sr. Martin Luther King Sr. was a Baptist minister in Atlanta. When Martin was growing up, he constantly saw signs that said, "white only" and "no coloreds allowed." Over the years, these signs angered Martin and he wanted to change it. He later became a Baptist minister, like his father.

Martin preached about love and peace and togetherness. He often preached to his congregation that they needed to fight the racism they saw each day "together not separate." They needed to make "peace not war." He also preached about fixing the injustices we see immediately, and not relying on other people to do it for us.

The places where only white people were allowed were often nicer and in better condition. One example of this is the segregated schools. The schools the white children attended had better books, more qualified teachers, and received more funding. The schools buildings themselves were just in better condition. The schools African American children attended were run-down and shabby. The books were often missing pages and taped together. Another example of the racism that Dr. King saw each day can be found in the neighborhoods that were heavily populated by African Americans. These neighborhoods were often poverty stricken, with very little public services provided. Dr. King organized the Poor Peoples March in 1968 to improve the public services, housing, and job opportunities in the African American neighborhoods.

"We are the ones we have been waiting for" is a phrase that can mean many different things to different people. To me, it means that we are the people that we have been waiting for to change the problems in our society. We cannot just sit back and wait and hope that other people fix the problems we see in our society. When we see

injustices in our world we need to step in and help. We need to be the ones who speak out and say that this is wrong and this needs to be fixed. Our ideas could be the ideas that change the world, if we don't speak up, the problems might never get fixed.

Martin Luther King taught this message in his teachings. He strongly believed in stopping the injustices we see and taking an immediate stand, not waiting for someone else to do it. This is what I feel this phrase means. Dr. King once said that everyone can be great and I think that he has inspired so many people to take a stand and be great. His teachings on standing up for what you believe in has helped many people stay true to what they think, because he believed everyone's ideas should be heard.

Martin Luther King made a great impact on both American and African American history. He preached that we should not judge people on the color of their skin or their race and we still have those issues here in America today. Just recently, the State of Arizona passed a law saying anyone can be pulled over and has to provide proof of citizenship. Many people believe that this law is a form racism due to the high Hispanic population of Arizona. In the South, people still hang confederate flags outside their house. These are just some of the examples of the racism in our country. The news that there are still reports of hate crimes, swastikas being painted on sides of buildings or crosses being burned on the lawns. People are attacking Muslim Mosques or Jewish Synagogues and making racial names and remarks. No one can walk through our school and not hear a racial joke. Though it seems to all be in the name of fun, you can never be sure if the joke-teller really means it. It's a joke one moment, then the next thing you know two people are yelling these things to each other during a fight.

I went to a football game in Lewis County recently and looking out over the field at the two teams, I saw only one African American football player. Rural counties in our area usually do not have a high population of minorities, but there he was running the ball, just like every other white person on the team. Martin Luther King helped to make this possible. Before him this African American player wouldn't have been allowed to go to the same school with his teammates, let alone play on the same team with them. There were no racial comments made and the referees did not make any calls based on race.

There is still a long way to go in the fight against racism but America has made progress, with the aid of Dr. Martin Luther King. We elected the first African American President in 2008. The election of President Obama has brought the issue of racism back into the spotlight light, and shown us how far we still have to go in Dr. Martin Luther King's fight. Dr. King's teachings tell us "we are the ones that we've been waiting for". It is up to us to stand up and say to other students telling racist jokes in our halls that this is wrong. When laws are passed that target people due to the color of their skin, we need to stand up and say that this is wrong. When we hear reports on the news of hate crimes we need to stand up and say that this is wrong, that racism in our country will not be tolerated. We need to make sure that our voices are loud enough to drown out the message of racism.

Bibliography:

Martin Luther King Jr.—Jean Darby

Martin Luther King, Jr.: Civil Rights Leader—Robert Jakoubek

Martins Big Words: the life of Martin Luther King Jr.—copyright 2002, Weston's Woods Studios. Based on the story Martins Big Words written by Dorreen Rapport